

Wild Mares: My Lesbian Back-to-the-Land Life

Katrina C Rose

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Wild Mares: My Lesbian Back-to-the-Land Life, by Dianna Hunter. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. xi, 239 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$18.95 paperback.

Reviewer Katrina C. Rose completed her doctorate in history at the University of Iowa in 2018. Her dissertation is titled "Forgotten Paths: American Transgender Legal History, 1955–2009."

Dianna Hunter retired in 2012 from the University of Wisconsin–Superior, where she was a lecturer and director of women's and gender studies. *Wild Mares*, covering merely a portion of Hunter's midwestern life's journey, chronicles her pre-Wisconsin years. A North Dakota adolescence fraught with Cold War nuclear fears preceded a move to the Twin Cities and attendance at Macalester College in St. Paul. A generation and a gender removed from *The Evening Crowd at Kirmser's*, Ricardo Brown's narrative of gay life in pre-Stonewall Minnesota, *Wild Mares* offers the remembrances of a woman coming to terms with her sexuality and coming to question where and how best to live as a woman-loving woman in a society that was only beginning to evolve.

Those with knowledge of Minnesota's tumultuous politics (sexual and otherwise) of the late 1960s and early 1970s will encounter familiar places, entities, and events: Hubert Humphrey's quest to return to the Senate after his vice presidency, the early days of Minneapolis's Amazon Bookstore, St. Paul's Town House bar, and the lesbian-feminist publication *So's Your Old Lady*. An adventure outside the Midwest, to the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference, yields Iowa's only notable presence in the memoir; a spring snowstorm targeting Mason City led to an unanticipated overnight stay while on the road to California.

The bulk of *Wild Mares* focuses not on the Twin Cities but on farmland to their north. For as much as Hunter's move to Minnesota led to a sexual awakening, it in turn led to a desire to dispense with as many material burdens of urban life as possible in favor of a purer existence living off the land. The stresses of attempting a communal existence and the frictions of varying relationships combined with the inherent uncertainties of farming to make her experience at different times rewarding and less than successful.

After arriving in the Twin Cities, Hunter learned that the personal is political. A decade of attempts at dairy farming self-sufficiency brought her back to the adage. By the mid-1980s she found that it applies not merely to women's quest for equality but also to agriculture. Far more than failed equipment or a failed relationship, the devastating impact of Reagan-era agriculture policies finally brought an end to her own attempt to get back to the land.

“This strange mental power of ours can be sketchy and unreliable,” she acknowledges about memory, “but it lets us bring the dead back to life and travel in time through multiple pasts” (2). Not reliant solely on her own memory, she has consulted archival materials and conferred with those she encountered years ago. In conversation with the reader, she pauses to note where the documentary and oral history evidence conflict with her own long-held recollections.

The volume consists of 23 chapters, all relatively short. Some boldly telegraph approaching sadness. The Minnesota focus should not dissuade an Iowa reader. Even if Iowa did not also see lesbian back-to-the-land endeavors in the 1970s, it certainly felt the agricultural pain of the 1980s.